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SUBJECT: FROZEN CONFLICTS: DAS BRYZA TALKS WITH RUSSIAN MFA

Classified By: Charge Daniel A. Russell. Reason: 1.4 (b, d)

SUMMARY

1. (C) EUR DAS Matt Bryza discussed frozen conflicts in Georgia with senior MFA officials August 1. South Ossetia negotiator Popov agreed that South Ossetian leader Kokoity is "not indispensable," suggested Kokoity might outlive his utility "in maybe 3 years or so," but asserted that he wields real power and "will be around for some time to come." Russia will not participate in the status commission Georgia has created to work with the Kurta authorities under Sanakoyev, but invited the U.S. to work closely with the Georgians and Russians to make the Joint Control Commission format a success. Bryza agreed that Georgia should try to engage Kokoity but questioned how long Russia would find it in its interests to continue to support his regime. Abkhazia negotiator Chernov urged Georgia to make a goodwill gesture and replace its delegate to the Chuburkhinja talks, who is unacceptable to the Abkhaz. He also urged the U.S. to facilitate a visit by Abkhaz "FM" Shamba to the UN. Bryza agreed that talks need to re-start, including between President Saakashvili and Abkhaz leader Bagapsh; this process should lead to a Shamba visit. Popov suggested a trilateral meeting among Saakashvili, Bagapsh and Kokoity. Tarabrin asserted that Russia is for stability on its southern borders, but not for the status quo. Bryza replied that it is hard to convince Georgia of that absent visible progress in the peace processes. END SUMMARY.

2. (C) Charge hosted a dinner August 1 for visiting EUR DAS Matt Bryza with MFA Ambassador at Large for South Ossetia Yuriy Popov, Ambassador at Large for Abkhazia Vladislav Chernov, and 4th CIS Department Acting Director Dmitriy Tarabrin. Bryza had worked with Chernov in meetings of the Friends of the Secretary General, but had not met Popov or Tarabrin.

South Ossetia

3. (C) Popov led off by warning that Tskhinvali leader Kokoity is "impulsive" and that Georgian policies appear to be aimed at provoking him into aggressive moves. Georgian backing for Kurta leader Sanakoyev has "no chance" of success, since Sanakoyev will never win the loyalty of the South Ossetian people or the acceptance of North Caucasians, who strongly back South Ossetia. Georgian hopes of dealing with Sanakoyev to the exclusion of Kokoity will never be realized, he said; and therefore Russia will not participate in the commission Georgia has set up to work out status with Sanakoyev. The current Joint Control Commission format, in which Kokoity participates, must be maintained. Popov made a cryptically phrased (comment: and perhaps unauthorized.) invitation to Bryza to work together with the Georgians and Russians to make the JCC process a success.

14. (C) Bryza replied that he had been working with the Georgians to get them to understand that they cannot garner international legitimacy if they do not engage Kokoity. At the same time, Bryza questioned how long Russia would want to be associated with someone as unsavory as Kokoity, given what all know about his criminal activities, impulsive attacks on Georgian villages, and blocking of JPFK investigations. Popov admitted that Kokoity is "a liability," and reiterated that he is "not indispensable." However, the reality is that Kokoity exercises real power in South Ossetia and enjoys strong support in Russia's sensitive North Caucasus. "He will be around for some time to come," Popov said, though he noted things could change "in maybe 3 years or so."

15. (C) Popov mentioned that Georgia has now officially notified Russia that it is pulling out of the 2000 agreement on economic development in South Ossetia. Bryza said he had urged the Georgians not to do this, telling them it is unwise to channel so much aid through Sanakoyev and so little through the OSCE -- not least because Sanakoyev cannot win the loyalty of the South Ossetians if he is perceived as a Georgian stooge.

Abkhazia  
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16. (C) Chernov asserted that Georgian actions have eroded the trust of the Abkhaz in the entire peace process. He inveighed against the Georgians establishing a summer camp next to Abkhazia "loaded up with girls and liquor to attract stupid Abkhaz." Chernov accused the Georgians of doubling the number of their forces in the Upper Kodori Valley. He said the Georgians had agreed to resume quadripartite talks in Chuburkhunja (and the Russians had agreed to relinquish

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the chair of these talks to UNOMIG). Then, however, they appointed as their negotiator a man who had participated in combat operations against the Abkhaz; as a "goodwill gesture," Georgia should replace him. Chernov urged the U.S. to facilitate a visit to the UN for Abkhaz "Foreign Minister" Sergey Shamba, saying this issue had now become a litmus test for the Abkhaz. Tarabrin added that the Abkhaz are accusing the Russians of being ineffective in talking to the Americans if they cannot even settle a simple visa issue.

17. (C) Bryza replied that Georgian leaders claimed there are no Abkhaz youth for many kilometers north of the Georgian summer camp and so there was little chance of clashes between "stupid youth who would want to do what we used to do when we were kids." Still, Bryza had told President Saakashvili that the U.S. questioned the wisdom of placing the camp in such provocative location. If Russia believes the Georgians have increased their forces over previous levels, it should ask for a joint monitoring mission to investigate. Bryza said he would discuss the Chuburkhinja appointment with the Georgians -- though of course if having fought in the war were a disqualification, the Georgians could object to the participation of Abkhaz "FM" Shamba.

18. (C) Bryza stressed that the Shamba visit to the UN had taken on purely symbolic value, as Shamba as access to four members of the UNSC, P5 and to a UN Under Secretary General through the Geneva-Friends Process. The Shamba visit needed to mark a step forward in the mediation process. Given Shamba's nasty claims via DVD to the UNSC last spring that Abkhaz and Georgians could never live together, and the risk of conflating the Kosovo and Abkhazia debates at the UN, now was not the time for a Shamba visit to New York. Such a visit could be helpful once Abkhaz leader Bagapsh accepted Georgian President Saakashvili's unconditional offer to meet. Bryza had worked hard to persuade Georgian President Saakashvili to convince him to meet without preconditions with Abkhaz leader Bagapsh, only to have his work undone when Bagapsh placed unacceptable preconditions on a meeting. The

Chuburkhinja talks should be resumed (with the Georgians perhaps offering a more palatable head of delegation), Bagapsh and Saakashvili should meet, and then Shamba could make a meaningful, as opposed to symbolic, visit to the UN. Bryza noted that preparations for the Sochi Olympics, if handled correctly, could build confidence and restore economic ties between Georgia and Abkhazia. Chernov said that right now the results of a Bagapsh-Saakashvili meeting are "predictable" and urged Bryza to be flexible with regard to the sequencing. But he and Tarabrin also concurred with Bryza's assessment that Russia does not actually want Kosovo to become a precedent for Abkhazia; rather, Russia worries that Kosovo may become a precedent with unpredictable and potentially dangerous consequences across the entire Caucasus. Bryza said he would discuss the issue with the Western friends, who have also objected to a merely symbolic Shamba visit to New York.

#### Russia's Aims

19. (C) Charge said that we increasingly hear from American commentators that Russia's tactics indicate that its strategy is to preserve the status quo in its neighborhood. A status quo cannot be maintained forever. What, he asked, is Russia's long-term strategy? Tarabrin answered that Russia is for stability, not for status quo. Russia understands that the status quo cannot be maintained indefinitely. However, in resolving the conflicts, stability is of the highest importance. This implies patience and a long-term view. Conflicts cannot be resolved overnight without instability. All need to realize that the process will take a long time. Popov added that Russia wants to resolve the South Ossetia conflict within the context of Georgia's territorial integrity, but that will take time. Chernov echoed that in 1996, when Boris Berezovskiy was Secretary of Russia's Security Council (and while Chernov was working there), Russia offered the Abkhaz USD four billion to resolve the conflict within Georgia's sovereignty; the Abkhaz refused.

10. (C) New ideas are needed on status, Chernov continued. Popov suggested that, when the time is right, a trilateral meeting -- Saakashvili, Bagapsh and Kokoity -- might take on status issues and work out new ideas. Such a meeting might take place in Moscow. Bryza said it was an interesting idea, though with some obvious downsides. He said he understood the Russian call for patience. The U.S. -- and he in particular -- have urged patience and restraint on the Georgians. But our urgings are ineffectual absent visible progress. If we just tell the Georgians to be "good little boys and girls" and stop making a fuss, we lose all leverage over them. The Georgians have to see the results of

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restraint in constant, if gradual, progress towards resolution of the conflicts.

11. (U) DAS Bryza has cleared this message.  
RUSSELL